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Hard look at US defense

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WASHINGTON—In an unprecedented move, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has decided to hold extensive hearings into the adequacy of Carter Administration defense programs and their implications on US foreign policy.

Starting with the Carter doctrine of drawing a line around the Persian Gulf and its oil, and labeling the area a vital interest that the United States would fight to protect, the committee will seek to assess whether the Administration has thought through the ramifications of its strategy and whether alternative approaches might make more sense.

Congressional and Administration sources say both the White House and the Senate Armed Services Committee are upset at the prospect of such wide-ranging hearings.

The White House is upset, sources say, because critical reports from the foreign relations panel during the next few months could hurt President Jimmy Carter's foreign affairs image a lot more than potshots from rivals for the presidency. It also is concerned because the committee intends to try to force Senate confirmation of national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and to require him to testify on defense issues, much as the Secretary of State does.

The Armed Services Committee, which has budget responsibility for defense, also is upset at this poaching on

its traditional turf. But, as Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said: "Our military budget may have set our foreign policy."

Church also noted that Armed Services recently put out a report criticizing SALT II even though that panel plays no formal role in the ratification process.

On the Carter doctrine, Senate sources say Church's committee wishes to explore such questions as whether the forces and weapons called for in the Administration's five-year defense budget projection are sufficient to protect the flow of Persian Gulf oil. It also wants to know whether, instead of a loosely coordinated group of regional states providing military facilities and money for arms, it might make more sense to ask NATO to extend its defense perimeter to the oil-rich Mideast.

Other issues on which hearings will be scheduled and interim reports released include:

- Rapid deployment force. Is the force of 110,000 troops, long-range aircraft and logistics ships adequate to the job of rushing to the Persian Gulf to repulse threats? Under what circumstances would such a force be deployed? Would such a force actually reassure nervous oil producers in the region that the United States would and could protect them?

- Strategic forces. Given the temporary shelving of SALT II

and the indefinite deferral of SALT III, how will impending Administration decisions on modernizing long-range missiles and bombers, affect the balance of power with the Soviet Union and the prospects for effective arms control?

- Medium-range NATO missiles. As the United States moves to produce and deploy in Western Europe nearly 600 missiles capable of striking deep inside the Soviet Union, do the strained relations with Moscow mean it will expand its plans for missiles aimed at NATO targets, and how will the regional balance and arms-control prospects be affected?

- Expanded US military presence in the Mideast and Indian Ocean. What effect will a permanent US naval presence and military facilities have on stability in the region? How much cooperation could be expected in face of a threat? Would access to air and naval bases be preferable to permanent US bases?

- Nuclear proliferation. What effect would supplying arms to Pakistan—despite its unwillingness to forswear exploding an atomic device—have on the Administration's effort to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons? And what effect will the congressionally mandated cessation of nuclear fuel shipments to India have on its decision on producing atomic weapons?

Sources say the committee also is interested in looking into efforts to loosen reporting requirements on CIA's covert activities, and to provide more modern weapons to such countries as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco and Oman.

Capitol Hill sources say the genesis of the Foreign Relations Committee's expansion came in a proposal by Sen. Henry Bellmon (R-Okla.) last fall for a select committee to study the adequacy of long-range defense and foreign policy plans before voting on SALT II.

Subsequently Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) urged that the Foreign Relations Committee's recommendations on the treaty be put off pending a study on the adequacy of Administration plans to increase defense spending over the next five years.

Instead, the committee decided to broaden both concepts and hold a series of inquiries on the whole range of Administration foreign, military, intelligence, economic and energy policies. The other pertinent committees have been invited to participate by sending two senators each to the Foreign Relations hearings.

The committee's professional staff, headed by William Bader, a former senior Defense Department intelligence official, found authority for such an approach in little-noticed Senate Rule 25, which says, in part, that Foreign Relations has jurisdiction to "study and review, on a comprehensive basis, matters relating to the national security policy, foreign policy and international economic policy as it relates to foreign policy of the United States ... and report thereon from time to time."

Sources say that Church and Glenn particularly are concerned that US decisions on military procurement and bases being pursued in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan will shape foreign policy options for years.

Thus came the decision, in effect, to broaden the writ of the committee to the full range of issues that affect those options.